



First United Church of Oak Park

Be Still

Psalm 46

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Our scripture for today comes from Psalm 46, but we will be trying something new, what you might call an experiential sermon based on Psalm 46:10.

Together we will practice a meditation. Hearing the word meditation has probably already evoked a feeling in you — maybe it's excitement, maybe dread, perhaps curiosity. I encourage you to lean into curiosity. The prayer that we usually pray before a sermon includes praying about the “meditations of all our hearts.” To meditate means to think deeply or carefully about something or to focus one's mind for a period of time, or it is a method of relaxation. So without having realized it, we meditate together regularly.

There are many benefits of meditation. It can help you relax, reduce stress, restore inner calm due to anxiety, and help you achieve personal insight, as well as decrease blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and heart rate. For anyone who has not practiced meditation, allow me to assure you that it does not require certain skills or expertise, and it does not look or sound the same for every person. Meditation can be quite simple, and it is a practice that can be adapted to fit you and your needs.

What I have found present in almost all meditations is quietness and breathing — other than that, there are no rules written in stone. As someone with ADD, I prefer guided meditations and usually hold a focus object. This helps me stay present, giving me something to channel my anxiety or intrusive thoughts into. If you think this might be helpful for you, I encourage you to grab something now. It can be play dough, a stone, a coin, a pendant, a beaded necklace, a fidget spinner, an action figure, a Rubik's cube, or anything else.

Before we start, let's take a quick inventory.

- How do you feel physically? What are you experiencing in your body?

- How do you feel mentally? What is your mood, your energy level?
- How do you feel emotionally? What emotions you are experiencing? How are you coping with them?

Our time of meditation will involve breathing, hearing a poem, a time of silence, and listening to our scripture. Anyone of any age can meditate. All you have to do is listen and do your best to stay present. Let's begin.

- Make yourself comfortable. I suggest being seated cross-legged on the floor, maybe on a pillow, or in a chair with your feet on the floor. Hold onto your focus object or settle your hands however is most comfortable for you, palms down on your thighs, or facing up resting on your knees, or folded in your lap perhaps.
- Keep your back straight, but relax your shoulders, relax your jaw, and breathe.
- Notice your breath. Breathe normally, maintaining your posture.
- Relax any part of your body that you notice tension in — maybe your chest, perhaps your neck, maybe your forehead.
- Begin to deepen your breath. Inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth.
- Inhale for 4 seconds 1-2-3-4, and exhale for 6 seconds 1-2-3-4-5-6. Inhale-2-3-4, exhale-2-3-4-5-6. (Breathe with fingers counting.)
- Continue breathing like this, in through your nose, out through your mouth, as you listen. You will have thoughts come to mind that distract you from this moment and your breathing; that's okay. Notice them, acknowledge them, and then as if your thought is a feather, picture it floating on the wind, landing on a stream, and then watch it gently float away, downstream, out of sight, out of mind. Do this with each thought that comes into your space of calm and quiet.
- Inhale-2-3-4, exhale-2-3-4-5-6.
- Release any tension. Hold your focus object or relax your hands. I invite you to close your eyes if you would like, knowing you can open them at any time. But open your ears so that you may hear, open your mind so that you may know, open your heart so that you may feel.

This is "Blessing in the Chaos" by Jan Richardson:

To all that is chaotic in you, let there come silence.

Let there be a calming of the clamoring,
a stilling of the voices that have laid their claim on you,
that have made their home in you,
that go with you even to the holy places but
will not let you rest,
will not let you hear your life with wholeness
or feel the grace that fashioned you.
Let what distracts you cease.
Let what divides you cease.
Let there come an end to what diminishes and demeans,
and let depart all that keeps you in its cage.
Let there be an opening into the quiet
that lies beneath the chaos,
where you find the peace you did not think possible
and see what shimmers within the storm.

(Silence)

Return your focus to your breath. Inhale-2-3-4, exhale-2-3-4-5-6. As you breathe in, imagine you are inhaling peace and calm. As you breathe out, imagine you are exhaling stress and anxiety.

Now imagine you are floating on a slow lazy river in a rowboat. It does not require steering. The river will not end; you are safe and secure. The boat is gently drifting with the steady flow of the water. You are lying on your back as the boat floats and can feel the warmth of the sun. A cool breeze brushes over you. The clouds gently drift across the blue sky. Time slows. There is no pressing place to be. You are exactly where you're supposed to be, here, floating. The water quietly laps against the boat. You feel calm and at peace.

BE ... still and know that I am God.

Be ... *STILL* ... and know that I am God.

Be still ... *AND* ... know that I am God.

Be still and ... *KNOW* ... that I am God.

Be still and know ... *THAT* ... I am God.

Be still and know that ... *I* ... am God.

Be still and know that I ... *AM* ... God.

Be still and know that I am ... *GOD*.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.
Be still and know that I.
Be still and know that.
Be still and know.
Be still and.
Be still.
Be.

I invite you to take another quick inventory now.

- How do you feel physically? What are you experiencing in your body?
- How do you feel mentally? What is your mood, your energy level?
- How do you feel emotionally? What emotions you are experiencing?

Psalm 46 tells us that, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah* ... be still and know that I am God.”

As you are ready, breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth, bring small movements to your fingers and toes, start to become aware of your surroundings, gently blink your eyes open.

Through meditation we can find refuge and a place to meet God, even in the midst of change, chaos, and challenges. All it takes is a little quiet and remembering to breathe. *Selah* – praise be. Amen.